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# The Significance of Emotional Intelligence In the Life of Jimmy Carter

Susan M. James  
*Augsburg College*

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**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE  
IN THE LIFE OF JIMMY CARTER**

**Susan M. James**

**Master of Arts in Leadership, Augsburg College**

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**Dr. Rosemary Link, Ph.D.**

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**Thesis  
James**

## ABSTRACT

According to recent studies, the most important predictor of success is not knowledge or technical aptitude. Rather, “Emotional Intelligence”, a concept developed by author and former Harvard professor Daniel Goleman in the 1990s, is the foundation for success. Goleman describes emotional intelligence as the ability to monitor one’s own feelings and the feelings of others, and to use this information to guide actions and decisions.

This paper examines the theory of emotional intelligence and its significance in the life of Jimmy Carter, the 39<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Known as the most ineffectual president of his time, he has since come to be revered internationally as a brilliant diplomat and influential humanitarian. What is it about Carter that has propelled him to champion incredible achievements and endure intense public humiliation, emerging stronger, happier and more fulfilled? The key to his success is emotional intelligence. Passionate and caring, yet driven and decisive, Jimmy Carter seems to epitomize the emotionally intelligent leader.

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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE LIFE OF JIMMY CARTER

He's the man known the world over as a peacemaker. A soft-spoken optimist who feels the ills of the world are his responsibility. A peanut farmer who cultivates international peace, health and humanitarianism. A virtuous father figure whose toothy grin has become his trademark. The man is Jimmy Carter, the 39<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, an entrusted diplomat, an action-oriented idealistic and a devout Christian.

What is it about Jimmy Carter that has driven him to champion incredible achievements and endure intense public humiliation, emerging stronger, happier and more fulfilled? The key to his success is emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is "the *understanding* of oneself and of others in motives, in habits of working, and in putting that insight into conducting one's own life and getting along with others" (Goleman, 1995, 40). It is this ability that separates Carter from individuals who never seem to get very far, despite their obvious intelligence and skills.

In this paper, emotional intelligence theory and its significance in the life of Jimmy Carter is examined. Known as the most ineffectual president of his time, he has since come to be revered internationally as a brilliant diplomat and untiring humanitarian. Passionate and caring, yet driven and decisive, Jimmy Carter seems to epitomize the emotionally intelligent leader.

This paper will summarize the life of Jimmy Carter. It will define for the reader emotional intelligence theory, and include an overview of the five basic skills necessary to achieve emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills). The reader will discover forces in Jimmy Carter's life that motivated him to incorporate emotional intelligence skills into his character and will

analyze the five essential skills as they relate to Carter's leadership style. Lastly, the paper will connect the theory of emotional intelligence to three different leadership theories: chaos theory, servant leadership, and symbolic convergence theory.

## **BACKGROUND**

To grasp the importance of emotional intelligence in Carter's life, it is important to understand his background. Life began humbly for Jimmy Carter. Born in rural Plains, Georgia on October 1, 1924, he grew up on the family farm nearby. It was a time great of southern racial inequality: The day Jimmy was born Georgia's Governor was the keynote speaker at the annual convention of the Ku Klux Klan.

Jimmy's father, known locally as Mister Earl, was a business owner and a farmer. A man of contradictions, Mr. Earl was serious, driven, and self-disciplined, but at the same time fun loving and quietly generous. His life was built upon one absolute: "Everything that occupies space must produce, or leave" (Smith & Benson, 1995, 39). Carter's mother, Lillian, was a registered nurse and, like her husband, was a fifth generation Georgian. Lillian was outspoken, and raised many an eyebrow by demonstrating great concern and caring for the health needs of her black neighbors (Bourne, 1997, 21).

According to historian Peter Bourne, Jimmy showed spunk at an early age, starting his own boiled peanut stand when he was five years old. At 13 he became a landlord, having earned enough money to buy a few small shacks that he rented to black sharecroppers. Throughout high school, his sole goal was to excel and prove his worth to the prestigious U.S. Naval Academy. Carter was accepted by the Academy and graduated at age 22. Over the course of the next seven years, he married, had three children, served his country on battleships and submarines, and studied nuclear physics and engineering.

His father died when Carter was 29. According to Bourne, Jimmy made the difficult decision to resign from the Navy against his wife's wishes, return to his boyhood home, and run the family businesses. Home again, he became active in affairs, progressing rapidly: Jimmy was elected to the school board at 32 and was made chair at 37, and was elected to the Georgia Senate at age 39. In 1970, the 46-year-old Carter was sworn in as Georgia's 76<sup>th</sup> Governor. His inaugural address made national headlines as Jimmy proclaimed an end to racial inequality – a highly unpopular stance for Georgian politician.

Jimmy became President of the United States in 1976, a time of great turmoil in the country. Carter inherited a nation divided by the social confusion of the 1960s and disillusioned by the political mayhem of the Nixon presidency. He was determined to overcome these obstacles by staying close to ordinary people. Jimmy demonstrated this commitment following his inaugural address, when he and his wife Rosalynn snubbed tradition and walked the parade route from the Capital to the White House.

Perhaps one of Jimmy's greatest presidential achievements was the signing of the Camp David Peace Accord between Israel and Egypt. During his presidency, he also passed the Panama Canal treaties, and helped bring peace to parts of Africa and Asia. Jimmy pardoned the Vietnam War draft dodgers, supported human rights, consumer rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment, and developed an energy program for the nation.

Despite these successes, Jimmy Carter soundly lost his second bid for the presidency to Ronald Reagan in 1980, leaving a country plagued with serious rates of inflation and an unresolved American hostage crisis in Iran. He was ridiculed by the media as a failed Commander in Chief.

After the embarrassing election loss, Jimmy returned home to Plains. It was a difficult transition. He found himself over one million dollars in debt, and for the first time

in many years without a plan for the future. Though dejected and doubtful, he relied on his internal strength to sustain him. Out of his confusion rose the concept for the Carter Center in Atlanta. This Center, focusing on world peace studies, has become a highly respected domain where world leaders can mediate problems, and scholars can gather to share ideas and develop action plans for curing the troubles of the world.

Today, Carter is the father of four and grandfather of nine, and is a world-renowned diplomat and humanitarian. He enjoys hiking, jogging, and writing, while at the same time furthering a staggering political agenda. Jimmy is well known for his volunteer work, especially with Habitat for Humanity (building homes for low-income people) and Friendship Force (joining people from differing nations to learn from each other).

A look back at Jimmy's 8<sup>th</sup> Grade scrapbook reveals an early emotional maturity:

If you think in the right way you will develop: (1) the habit of accomplishing what you attempt, (2) the habit of expecting to like other people, (3) the habit of deciding quickly what you'd like to do and doing it, (4) the habit of sticking to it, (5) the habit of welcoming cheerfully all wholesome ideas and experiences... a person who wants to build good mental habits should avoid the idle daydream; should give up worry and anger; hatred and envy; should neither fear nor be ashamed of anything that is honest and purposeful. (Bourne, 1997, 37)

It is this emotional maturity, or emotional intelligence, which has enabled Carter to accomplish notable successes and sustain tragic losses throughout his lifetime.

### **THEORY OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

Traditionally, high intelligence and technical expertise have been considered the hallmarks of a great leader. A recent study by Daniel Goleman, an expert in emotional intelligence, refuted this belief. It indicated that almost 90% of what distinguishes the

outstanding leaders from the average ones is attributed to emotional intelligence rather than cognitive aptitudes (Goleman, 1998, 10).

“Emotional intelligence is the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Abraham, 1999, 1). The basic skills of emotional intelligence are divided into five key areas:

1. *Self-aware* individuals see the reality of a situation and recognize a feeling as it happens. They have a keen understanding of their emotions, strengths, weaknesses, values, and goals, and thus are realistic, candid and honest. They value integrity.
2. *Self-regulating* people control feelings and impulses, managing their disruptive moods by channeling the energy in useful ways. They are reasonable and reflective. These individuals are highly comfortable with change, and make intelligent decisions by suspending judgement and seeking a wide-range of information.
3. *Internally motivated* people are not swayed by external rewards. They love to learn, take pride in their work, and look for challenges; thus they are optimistic and persistent even in the face of defeat.
4. *Empathetic* individuals consider the feelings of others when making wise decisions. They are attuned to body language, understand the importance of cultural differences, and can sense the feelings of others. Empathy manifests itself in the ability to treat people individually and fairly according to each person’s emotional reaction.
5. *Socially skilled* people have many informal networks, in which they work and live. They are artistic persuaders, collaborators, and consensus builders. Their expertise is building trust and rapport with people of all kinds.

The theory of emotional intelligence is grounded in the belief that the most effective individuals are able to personally connect with others by understanding emotions. Many effective leaders exemplify the basic attributes of emotional intelligence: they keep their cool, manage conflict, bring others to consensus, and arouse a passionate following.

Emotionally intelligent leaders bring passion to their work, and lead with their heads and their hearts. Simply, they excel. By developing emotional intelligence, individuals reach a greater degree of success, and build stronger, more trusting relationships. In addition, they are likely to be happier and content, with a network of friends and a persevering attitude.

### **MOTIVATING FORCES IN CARTER'S LIFE**

In reviewing Jimmy Carter's life, a number of situations emerge where he was compelled to learn and practice the skills of emotional intelligence. Through the examples of people he loved and respected, this style was created and reinforced.

#### **YOUNG BOY**

Jimmy Carter learned to respect all living things. When he was young, his father, an avid outdoors person, fashioned a slingshot for Jimmy. One day Jimmy aimed at a robin perched on his front-yard fence – and, to his surprise, he hit it. Jimmy was mortified, and, with tears streaming down his face, he approached his parents holding the lifeless bird.

Seeing such remorse, many parents might have tried to comfort the boy, but not Earl and Lillian. Jimmy recalls, “After a few awkward moments, Daddy didn't help by saying, ‘We shouldn't ever kill anything that we don't need for food.’ Mama partially salvaged my feelings by adding, ‘We'll cook the bird for your supper tonight’” (Carter, 1988, 12). His parents encouraged him to have empathy and to take personal responsibility for his actions – attributes that would strengthen his emotional intelligence.

## NAVAL CAREER

Jimmy's naval commanders had profound influence on his thoughts about leadership. For instance, his second commander exercised his power arbitrarily. This resulted in low moral and "smoldering resentment" (Carter, 1996, 92). Under his command, Jimmy's commitment dwindled, and he questioned his career choice.

Transferred the next year, Jimmy's new captain was quite the opposite: He was friendly, compassionate and extremely lenient, which at first was a welcome relief. Soon, Jimmy adopted his lackadaisical work ethic – until he realized that his confidence in the safety of the submarine was compromised by his careless attitude.

In contrast, he developed a deep admiration for his final commanding officer, Admiral Hyman Rickover. Although intensely demanding, Jimmy realized that Rickover demanded even more of himself. Yet, his ideal leader was J.B. Williams, Jr. Jimmy describes Williams as "natural leader... he was bold and aggressive... he was also a kind and gentle man... he was strict and clear in his demands on the crew, but always ready to forgive mistakes when we made them" (Carter, 1996, 94). In many ways throughout his lifetime, Carter's leadership style has emulated that of Williams.

## FATHER'S DEATH

Jimmy was a rising young naval officer when his father died. As neighbors shared stories at the funeral, Jimmy first learned of Earl's quiet generosity. The towns-people "told him story after story of Mister Earl's private goodness, of how the strict segregationist bought graduation gowns for poor black students, donated money for them to go to college, dismissed the money owed to him by black tenants for so long that his whole business was in danger of sinking" (Smith & Benson, 1995, 43).

Jimmy's admiration for the work his father had done grew. Carter questioned, "Whose life is more important in the eyes of God – mine or his?" (Carter, 1996, 43).

Through deep soul-searching, Carter came to believe that a naval career would never allow him to impact people's lives like his father had done. Jimmy made the difficult decision to leave his promising career, and returned to Georgia to run the family businesses.

### **MOTHER'S LATE-LIFE EXAMPLE**

At the age of 72, Jimmy's mother joined the Peace Corps. She felt a compelling need to help the impoverished in the world, and pledged to go someplace where "the people were black" (Bourne, 1997, 173). Her commitment landed her in India, where she spent the next few years in a small village plagued with high poverty, ill health and malnutrition. While suffering from hunger herself, she selflessly shared the care packages sent from her family with the villagers.

Carter was immensely proud of his mother, and learned from her an important lesson about actively living all phases of life. "There is a big difference between getting older and growing old," he explained in his book, *The Virtues of Aging* (1998, 110).

### **REALIZATION OF LIFE'S MEANING**

Carter's dedication to finding meaning in life was solidified at the funeral of Mrs. Martin Luther King, Sr., when Reverend Martin Otis preached about "the dash".

He said there would be a marker on Mrs. King's grave, with her name and a couple of dates – when she was born and when she died – and a little dash in between. He said he didn't want to talk about when she was born, or when she died, but about that little dash. (Carter, 1996, 237)

Carter thought hard about the "little dash" that represented life, and how people often underestimate their ability to live life fully, to use their talents, abilities, and



knowledge to do something exceptional. From that sermon, he came to the realization that it is not the achieving, but the reaching and inspiration that give people a full life.

### **ANALYSIS**

Explaining the theory of emotional intelligence, Daniel Goleman states that the most effective leaders are alike in one critical way: They all practice a high degree of emotional intelligence (1998, 3). He defines the key ingredients of emotional intelligence as skills of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social abilities. Goleman explains, “My research, along with other recent studies, clearly shows that emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership. Without it, a person can have the best training in the world, an incisive, analytic mind, and an endless supply of smart ideas, but he still won’t make a great leader” (1998, 4).

Carter has developed the attributes of emotional intelligence throughout his lifetime. He understands his emotions, regulates his impulses, and derives his motivation internally. Carter also has strong empathetic and social skills, and uses these to bring about change in the world. The following section will describe the attributes of emotional intelligence, and reveal how Jimmy uses these skills to enhance his leadership abilities.

### **SELF-AWARENESS**

People who have a keen sense of self-awareness recognize their feelings and are able to explain to themselves and others their moment-to-moment emotions. They see the link between their thoughts, feelings and actions. Self-aware individuals know if and when their emotions are ruling a decision, and understand that they are capable of making alternative choices. They have an understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses, possess integrity and have a good grasp of reality.

Carter has developed a firm understanding of his strengths, weakness, and drives. He uses this knowledge to objectively review past life experiences, focus on future goals, and develop strategies for success. Jimmy has come to rely on his strengths, compensate for his weaknesses, and accept the good with the bad in order to achieve his goals.

“I never really liked the political world, the posturing, the appealing for votes, the tailoring of answers. I have no taste for that. The political life was really an aberration,” he explained in a 1995 *Life* article. When asked why he did it, Jimmy replied simply, “I did it to reach a goal” (Smith & Benson, 44).

The still goal-oriented Carter has become content and accepting in his later life. Understanding his weaknesses, he capitalizes on his strengths. In reflection, Carter said, “There’s no more doubt about what my goals should be....I feel truer to myself. I’m more a missionary than a politician. I am really where I belong” (Smith & Benson, 1995, 46).

### **Integrity.**

Jimmy Carter possesses a strong sense of integrity manifested in conscientiousness, accountability, and morality. He finds power through his inner strength rather than authority, rank and title.

The world saw Carter’s strong principles during his first presidential bid when he stated emphatically, “If I ever let you down in my actions, I want you to let me know about it and I’ll correct it. I promise never to betray your trust in me” (Bourne, 1997, 157). This focus on integrity formed the question that guided Carter’s presidential campaign, “Can our government be honest, decent, open fair and compassionate?” (Hargrove, 1988, 11).

Even as he conceded his loss to Reagan, he painfully and honestly conveyed his feeling of loss to his devotees. “I promised you four years ago that I would never lie to

you,’ Carter told his weeping supporters, echoing his memorable campaign line. ‘So I can’t stand here tonight and say it doesn’t hurt’” (Brinkley, 1988, 1).

Post-presidency, Carter has been criticized for commiserating with inhumane foreign rulers. While Carter doesn’t approve of the actions of these rulers, he believes the atrocities will continue if someone doesn’t try to mediate the problem. Worried more about his moral conviction than about public criticism, Carter explains, “The people who cause human-rights abuses are the same ones who can stop them, and if no one else will talk to them, I will. It’s not only an opportunity, it’s a responsibility” (Smith & Benson, 1995, 27).

His integrity was apparent when the Carter Center launched a campaign to immunize poor children in Atlanta. After spending the day canvassing neighborhoods with a troop of volunteers, Carter’s hands-on behavior was questioned by reporters. He replied matter of factly, “It’s inconceivable to me that I would sit behind a desk while 8,000 volunteers go out and knock on doors” (The Ex-President, 1999, 6).

Carter lives his life with integrity and respect for all people. Cutting shrubs at his local church, he said, “There’s no difference between the higher and the lower work. If everyone else in my church cleaned up trash but I didn’t it would be excruciatingly embarrassing to me. I couldn’t imagine not doing this” (Smith & Benson, 1995, 15).

### **Grasp of Reality.**

Jimmy was well aware of the impact of southern stereotypes on his success. In a *Life* article in 1995, Jimmy spoke about the political cartoons that tormented his presidency. He explained that his family was depicted as hillbillies, with their eyes crossed and straw coming out of their ears. While Carter didn’t dwell on the bias against southerners during his term, he was realistic about the impact it might have, and understood that he would be underestimated by some because of it (Smith & Benson, 26).

Carter does not let others write his reality for him. For example, he seems quite at ease about the fact that he has been branded one of the least-effective Presidents of all time. In the same *Life* article, he stated his reality of the situation; “I don’t feel I have any need for redemption. I don’t feel I failed as President. They write about me like I’m a different person now. As a matter of fact, I haven’t changed” (Smith & Benson, 26).

## **SELF-REGULATION**

Emotionally intelligent people are self-regulating: They feel a sense of control over their emotions and environment. It is important to realize that these individuals *do* have fluctuating feelings – they do not live a Pollyanna existence. Yet, they learn to deal with feelings constructively, handling their emotions to fit the situation. At times, they are excitable, enthusiastic and energized; while at other times they can be reflective and thoughtful. They don’t mute their emotions, nor do they let them run out of control. This self-mastery, withstanding and controlling our emotional storms, is the key to effective leadership. Said Goleman, “Often, we have little or no control over *when* we are swept away by emotion, nor over *what* emotion it will be. But we can have some say in *how long* it will last” (1995, 57). Thus, we can control not the emotion, but how we react to it.

When individuals learn to manage emotions, they realize what is behind a feeling (for instance, because you hurt me I may feel anger towards you.) In this way, they learn ways to handle emotions. But it isn’t enough to simply realize that they are experiencing emotion – emotionally intelligent individuals take responsibility for decisions and actions.

William Glasser, founder of Control Theory, agreed that individuals possess the power to control their actions. This ability will lead to more healthy, productive lives.

“Regardless of how we feel, we always have some control over what we do,” says Glasser (1984, 45).

**Manage Impulses.**

A key to managing emotions is controlling impulses, or, being able to defer gratification and control and channel the urge to act. A longitudinal study conducted by Stanford University researchers Shoda, Mischel and Peake (1990) tracked a group of four-year-olds through high school. As preschoolers, they were given a marshmallow. If the children could wait till the researcher left the room and came back before eating the marshmallow, they would receive two marshmallows as a reward.

Results of the study were dramatic: Preschoolers who resisted their impulses to immediately eat the marshmallow grew up to be more self-assertive, socially skilled, independent, and determined as adolescents, and achieved significantly higher SAT scores than their impulsive peers. In contrast, the marshmallow eaters were more stubborn, indecisive, easily frustrated, and mistrustful. They were more likely to shy away from social contacts and regress or become paralyzed by stress. In addition, they were still not able to put off gratification (Goleman, 1995, 81-82).

Jimmy Carter practiced impulse control at an early age. When he shot the robin off the fence and then ate it for dinner, he was taught that all actions have consequences, and that he needed to be responsible for his decisions. Perhaps without knowing it, Mister Earl and Lillian contributed to Jimmy's emotional intelligence continually during his childhood.

As a leader, Jimmy seeks to make better decisions by controlling the impulse to act, and then identifies alternative actions before moving forward. While disconcerting to some, this calmness has contributed to his success. As Goleman explained, "People with fiery temperaments are frequently thought of as 'classic' leaders – their outbursts are considered hallmarks of charisma and power. But when such people make it to the top, their impulsiveness often works against them" (1998, 32). What Carter may lack in

charisma he makes up for with the ability to control impulses. It allows him to roll with the changes in his life. When a change is taking place, he does not panic; instead, he postpones judgement, seeks out a variety of information, and makes informed decisions.

**Suspend Judgment, Seek Information and Make Sound Decisions.**

Carter is a firm believer in learning about issues through “intensive study and homework” (Hargrove, 1988, 24). During his political years, he resisted setting up a hierarchy of key advisors, preferring to individually meet with multiple sources. Although the press and political rivals often criticized this method, to Carter this was the most efficient way to make decisions. It allowed him to integrate diverse ideas and constituencies, and maintain a spirit of cooperation, not competition.

Carter did not like making decisions in group meetings. In *Jimmy Carter as President*, Erwin Hargrove described Jimmy’s decision-making style as “collegial – meaning simply that he liked to work with small groups of trusted advisors in a problem-solving mode with minimal formal structure” (1988, 14). Carter adamantly did not want a competitive relationship among his staff, nor did he feel the need to have organizational checks and balances. Hargrove explained, “He brought his confidence in reason and goodwill to executive decision making” (1988, 14).

**Intuition.**

Emotionally intelligent individuals listen to their ongoing inner conversation and use this as a source of information for decision-making. Some call this inner voice intuition, a special type of knowledge that is unique to each individual, acquired through past experiences. It is an important element in emotional intelligence: “We are paying a drastic price, in our personal lives and organizations, for our attempts to separate our hearts from our heads and our emotions from our intellect” (Cooper, 1997, 7).

Only by getting – and staying – in touch with our inner voices can we develop a deep source of knowing beyond our thoughts. That is the realm of emotional intelligence. You will find that much of the truth about your life and work is inside of you, not outside. (Cooper, 1997, 37)

Noted psychologist Carl Jung examined the full world of the unconscious in his book *Man and His Symbols*. Jung described the importance of the inner mind: “Subliminal sense perceptions play a significant part in our everyday lives. Without our realizing it, they influence the way in which we react to both events and people” (1964, 20). Jung believed the unconscious could be used to guide our lives. Through it, people could become energized and filled with creativity.

A striking example of Jimmy Carter’s trust in his inner voice occurred about one year after his presidential loss. He was trying to decide the focus for his future. Jimmy didn’t push the issue, but trusted when the time was right the answer would appear. As Rosalynn describes it, Jimmy bolted from sleep in the middle of the night, and excitedly and assuredly began to make clear his inspiration, “I know what we can do...we can develop a place to help people who want to resolve disputes” (Carter & Carter, 1987, 31). Carter’s ideas, vague at the time, gave rise to the world-renown Carter Center.

## **MOTIVATION**

Emotionally intelligent individuals have an internal motivation that drives them and their decisions. They are passionate, love learning, and take pride in all that they do. It is this type of leader that can stir people to excel, to be enthusiastic, and to be persistent.

If there is one trait that virtually all-effective leaders have, it is motivation. They are driven to achieve beyond expectations – their own and everyone else’s...those

with leadership potential are motivated by a deeply embedded desire to achieve for the sake of achievement. (Goleman, 1998, 33)

Throughout Jimmy Carter's life, he was driven by internal urgings to do more, to do well, to be honorable – even when it wasn't the popular thing to do. As a young man, he supported the black population, although pressured by friends, customers and church members to be a segregationist. As Governor of Georgia, he cut spending for many well-established programs that he felt were unnecessary. And, as President, he stood up for international human rights and many other politically unpopular issues. Says Carter, "I devoted a major part of my presidential influence and authority to what was really an unpopular thing to do, but the right thing to do" (Conaway, 1999, 4). It is his inner drive, his focus on not only doing but doing what was right, that set Jimmy apart from other political leaders of his time.

### **Commitment and Passion.**

One can recognize emotionally intelligent individuals through their motivational style – they are passionately committed to a cause outside of themselves. Carter agrees with the positive impact of commitment and passion, "One subtle measurement of life's quality is the degree of interest we have in things outside ourselves" (Carter, 1998, 119).

A recent study found that emotional intelligence was an influential predictor of commitment – "fully 15% of the variance in organizational commitment was explained solely by emotional intelligence" (Abraham, 1999, 17). Simply, when people love what they do for the work itself, they feel committed and passionate about the group that makes that work possible.

It is the act of resonating passion that helps make a leader. "The most effective leaders have a very finely honed political awareness and ability... 'political' in the sense I



mean is a knack for articulating a mission or a goal and knowing how to bring everyone on board to get it accomplished” (Fischer, 1998, 9). Jimmy Carter had that commitment and passion, as evidenced in his presidential campaign contribution letter:

A bumper crop of peanuts, I learned years ago, is not made at harvest time, but in the early spring when you prepare a good seed bed....I believe so strongly that our government can be decent, truthful, fair, compassionate and efficient and I need your help so urgently that I am going to ask you and each donor to make a personal sacrifice....Will you reach out your hand to me once again? Rosalynn and I will do our best to never disappoint you. (Bourne, 1997, 274)

### **Optimism and Perseverance.**

People with high internal motivation have the capability to remain optimistic even when the score is against them. Goleman defined optimism as “having a strong expectation that, in general, things will turn out all right in life, despite setbacks and frustration...an attitude that buffers people against falling into apathy, hopelessness, or depression in the face of tough going” (1995, 88).

Optimistic individuals attribute failure to the situation, not as a personal shortcoming. By seeing not an internal but an external reason for their failure, they readily change their approach and refocus their efforts, in order to succeed the next time. Emotionally intelligent individuals have a sense of hope, believing that they have both the will and the way to achieve their goals, whatever they may be.

Carter experienced a number of very public humiliations during his political career, from biased, non-supportive media exposure to a painfully embarrassing presidential loss to Ronald Reagan. It was Carter’s tenacity, his ability to persevere, that has allowed him to accept these experiences, learn from them, and move on.

When I return to my beginnings, I see a number of times when what I believed I wanted most was challenged by a more difficult path. When I had the courage to choose that path, even in the midst of despair and uncertainty, I was given a glimpse of deeper truths that continue to sustain me. (Carter, 1996, 15)

## **EMPATHY**

Rarely do people put their emotions into words. Leaders need to intuit subtle body language to hear the unspoken message. Emotionally intelligent individuals have this capacity for perceiving the full intent of another's thoughts by interpreting the tone of voice, posture, gestures, and facial expressions as part of the message.

One of Jimmy's greatest assets as a world peacemaker is his empathy. Reporters Smith and Benson concur, "He remembers... spinning the globe until his finger found Moscow, trying to feel what Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev felt: the frozen ocean to the north; no ocean at all to the east, south and west; two enemies... on his flanks" (1995, 29). Empathy gave Carter the ability to step back and look at the whole of the situation – with his head and with his heart – before making a decision.

Throughout his life, Jimmy Carter has focused on understanding others, stating "All too often, conflicts and wars arise when we fail to consider the views of others or to communicate with them about differences between us" (Carter, 1996, 140). Whether working with impoverished families in rural Georgia or dictators on the other side of the world, he has learned that the keys to successful relationships are tolerance, sympathy, and generous understanding.

With increasing maturity, I have seen more clearly that I must adapt to differences among people, learn to accept the imperfect, understand the fallibilities of ourselves

and others and have mercy...it is a goal to be sought, a process that should continue throughout our lives. (Carter, 1996, 83)

He strives to know people individually, and not objectify them. “One of his greatest political attributes was an ability to give each individual his undivided attention, looking intensely into their eyes as he shook hands and spoke to them...it was a powerfully endearing quality” (Bourne, 1997, 178). Building rapport was one of his greatest strengths.

### **Constructive Criticism.**

“Outstanding coaches and mentors get inside the heads of the people they are helping. They sense how to give effective feedback. They know when to push for better performance and when to hold back” (Goleman, 1998, 53). Thus, an empathetic person understands the importance of constructive criticism – critiquing an act, not the person. Positive criticism focuses on what a person has done and can do rather than blaming a person’s character for a job poorly done. Conversely, destructive criticism “leaves a person on the receiving end feeling ashamed, disliked, blamed, and defective, all of which are more likely to lead to a defensive response than to steps to improve things” (Goleman, 1995, 135).

President Carter understood the importance of looking at the deed rather than the person. For example, he initiated a politically unpopular method of dealing with extreme dictators from other nations: He focused on building a relationship with the individual in power. Carter explained the importance of focusing on the deed rather than the person:

[We must] focus on pragmatic goals: to prevent war, to reduce suffering, and to open up and bring positive change to cruel or repressive regimes. Often this can be done only if we are willing to communicate with the people in power, however

unsavory they may be. Only our willingness to have a dialogue enables us to find room for compromises. (Carter, 1996, 145)

### **Trust.**

Carter strove for trust in all relationships. One of the most visible examples was his negotiation of the Panama Canal treaties. He recalled, “The Panamanians were bound to us through historic precedent. They trusted us, and had to...but still, we were not treating them fairly.” Against popular opinion, Carter developed a very “intense personal relationship” with Panama’s leader, General Omar Torrijos, one built on “mutual trust and respect”. Carter was embarrassed by the United States’ prior treatment of the Panamanians, and expressed his remorse for “seventy-five years of hurt feelings and insults and slights and broken promises” (Conaway, 1999, 13-15).

His accessibility and attentiveness to others (both at home and abroad) has helped him build trust and has made him stand out from the crowd. Carter’s availability was crucial to his political influence, helping him to change feelings of resentment and mistrust into productive relationships. He lived his life empathetic to the “commoner”, as was conveyed in his acceptance speech for governor: “The test of government is not how popular it is with the privileged few, but how honestly and fairly it deals with the many who must depend on it” (Bourne, 1997, 201).

Carter believes that trust will conquer all – and that to gain trust, morality must rule all decisions. He moved into the White House believing that the failures of presidents Johnson and Nixon were moral ones, and that the people had elected him to reinstate a government “as good and honest and decent and compassionate and filled with love as are the American people” (Brinkley, 1998, 3).

Carter also displays a fundamental trust in the human spirit, which crosses all cultures and boundaries. As President, he helped to organize the Friendship Force. The still growing organization coordinates international travel experiences for people from around the world. Through it, Carter firmly believes that common folks from separate lands will get to know and trust each other, eliminating stereotypes and spurring world peace.

After his presidency, Jimmy became involved in Habitat for Humanity. Carter explained that the program provides “the dignity of decent housing” and that “an equal benefit is to bring together people from widely differing backgrounds who might otherwise never have met, enriching us all with a reminder of our common humanity” (Carter, 1996, 22). His intent with these and other programs was to promote a spirit of trust that would resonate throughout the world among all people.

## **SOCIAL SKILLS**

Emotional intelligence theory stresses the importance of social skills, defined as “friendliness with a purpose: moving people in the direction you desire” (Goleman, 1998, 55). Thus, individuals with high emotional intelligence are expert persuaders. They use a combination of their self-awareness, self-regulation and empathetic skills to relate to develop broad networks.

Goleman further explained, “The stars of an organization are often those who have thick connections on all networks, whether communications, expertise, or trust.” (1995, 162). They have the ability to create and sustain informal networks, and understand the important function these networks play in their lives. Consequently, star performers rarely fail because they focus on building reliable networks before they actually need them, and use their relationships sparingly.

### **Negotiation and Collaboration.**

Emotionally intelligent people are expert at managing teams. Their ability to motivate people (themselves and others) makes them superb collaborators – their passion for the work radiates to others and drives the entire group to find creative solutions.

Collaboration is the element that brings out the creativity in the group and leads to the groups' ultimate success. Goleman elaborated, "It is this ability to harmonize that, all other things being equal, will make one group especially talented, productive and successful, and another – with members whose talent and skill are equal in other regards – do poorly" (1995, 160).

In his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge described the power of collaboration: Most of us at one time or another have been part of a great "team," a group of people who functioned together in an extraordinary way – who trusted one another, who complimented each others' strengths and compensated for each others' limitations, who had common goals that were larger than individual goals, and who produced extraordinary results. (1990, 4)

Jimmy's collaborative spirit is perhaps best seen in the Carter Center. Rather than imitate his predecessors and construct a library for his presidential papers, Carter founded an institution from which he could continue his long history of public service. The Center allows Jimmy to bring together diverse groups, which "often obtain results where scores of nonprofit groups, working individually, had failed" (Whiteclay Chambers, 1998, 38).

Carter has developed deep networks, collaborations and relationships, and has a broad circle of friends and acquaintances. He has a capacity for finding common ground with all kinds of people – a knack for building rapport. Jimmy has used his skills of relationship building to create an atmosphere where people trust one another and work

effectively toward mutual goals. As such, his style “inspired extraordinary loyalty and dedication. He never told people to work hard; he just made sure that everyone on the staff knew he was working harder than they were” (Bourne, 1997, 372).

### LEADERSHIP THEORY CONNECTIONS

As described in the preceding pages, Jimmy Carter’s approach to life resonates with Goleman’s theory of emotional intelligence. However, other leadership theories also help define Carter’s leadership abilities, both in terms of his strengths and his weaknesses as a leader.

### CHAOS THEORY

The world is just beginning contemplate chaos theory, “a new appreciation of the relationship between order and chaos” (Wheatley, 1994, 11). Chaos theory is grounded in the notion that a very small occurrence can produce complex, unpredictable and sometimes drastic results by triggering a series of increasingly critical events. Yet, underneath every small change lies an underlying order in all that encircles us.

The power of emotional intelligence comes partly from our ability to use feelings, intuition and empathy as a monitor for sensing opportunities and danger. Emotionally intelligent individuals may be able to quickly sense and analyze the minute changes that can bring about extreme results. Yet, these abilities may also be a drawback: Intuitive judgements, because they are made in the blink of an eye, can be somewhat misguided and simplified. Because intuition is based on past events, the “emotional mind reacts to the present *as though it was the past*” (Goleman, 1995, 295).

In trusting their intuition, emotionally intelligent individuals sometimes spring into action before even considering what they are doing. For example, in an effort to appeal to young voters during his bid for presidency against Gerald Ford, Carter’s press secretary

talked him into an interview for *Playboy* magazine. After the interview, the reporter began to leave the room, but paused at the door. He turned and asked Carter if he thought a born-again Christian could fairly govern. Jimmy answered the question by quoting the biblical Sermon on the Mount, ending with the passage about lustful, adulterous individuals. “And the reporter asked, ‘have you ever had lust?’ And I said, ‘Yes, when I was in high school and college, before I fell in love with Rosalynn’” (Carter, 1996, 9).

*Playboy*’s published interview focused on Jimmy’s admission of lust, ingoring the remainder of the quote. Consequently, Carter’s acknowledgment became the predominant media story of the entire campaign, with catastrophic effects: Carter dropped 15 percentage points and almost lost the election. He was so disconcerted by the *Playboy* fiasco that he first discussed it with reporters in 1996, some 20 years after it occurred.

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

Robert Greenleaf, a former AT&T executive who consulted with higher educational institutions during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, founded the theory of Servant Leadership. According to Greenleaf, “...*the great leader is seen as servant first*, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness” (1977, 7). Thus, it is fundamental that servant leaders have made a conscious decision to become a leader, to lead as a way of serving others. The crucial test is, “Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit...?” (Greenleaf, 1977, 13-14).

While the theories of emotional intelligence and servant leadership share many characteristics (for instance, collaboration, trust, foresight, and active listening) these attributes must be held in balance to be effective. For example, Jimmy opted for a political



life to best serve the world. He held strong moral convictions around trust and collaboration, and was determined that his actions would emulate his beliefs. This strong bias toward his convictions, no matter how noble, caused him to lose effectiveness as a political leader. Carter “believed that even private conversations with senators, for example, might cause him to compromise – or look as though he were compromising – his principles” (Brinkley, 1998, 6). In relinquishing his ability to have private conversations, Carter missed a great opportunity for compromise, creative solutions, and relationship building.

Carter could have learned from the servant leadership model. He believed that he was voted into office to serve the ordinary person – not the people in power. Yet, in his fixation to serve the common folk and unwillingness to be part of the ‘good old boys network’, Carter neglected to serve those who could perhaps most help him achieve his goals – his fellow legislators and wealthy political supporters. He would have undoubtedly increased his effectiveness if he had been willing to serve all those with whom he came in contact – from the wealthiest and most influential to the poorest and least powerful citizens.

## **SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE THEORY**

By analyzing the decision-making process of small groups, Ernest Bormann developed the theory of Symbolic Convergence. It illustrates that groups share messages and symbols to gain acceptance and to recruit new members, and to make rational sense out of their own and others’ personalities, decisions, actions, and words.

Symbolic convergence helps groups develop a relationship between reality – which is rational, and our perceptions of that reality – which may be irrational. We create group symbols that take on meaning and develop a life of their own, whether they are based in

reality or not. In this way, the group's reality emerges from this connection between words and symbols: In essence, communication creates the reality because it helps group participants make sense of their perceptions and understand what is happening.

Jimmy had a vision and the ambition to solve multiple, overwhelming problems, yet at times he was blind to symbolic convergence. Because he was a relative newcomer to politics, Carter had little sense of the past. He blundered by proposing courses of action that were unpopular and impractical. Jimmy ignored the signs and symbols that told him his plans would not work – from the ribbing of the media to the bashing by members of Congress. As one analyst put it, “Carter's chief weakness seems to have been an inability to appreciate the seriousness of the contradictions that confronted him, a belief that all good things must be compatible” (Hargrove, 1988, 173-174).

## CONCLUSION

Comprehending the concept of “Emotional Intelligence” is a key strategy for leaders who want to succeed in this fast-paced, global world. In an atmosphere of team-based work groups, downsizing of large corporations and the increasing number of small businesses, commitment and passion are the buzzwords for how to get things done. Emotional intelligence plays a vital role in this type of workplace – leaders can not ignore the display of emotions if they expect their workforce to be passionate. Thus, the importance of connecting with people's feelings is a crucial skill. To develop this skill, one must be expert in self-awareness and self-regulation, derive motivation internally, respond empathetically and possess a high degree of social skills.

Leadership success depends on the ability to understand oneself and relate well with others. Utilizing emotions as a basis for actions and decisions develops these abilities. Through intuiting and using information on emotions, individuals will have a greater

degree of success, nurture stronger, more trusting personal relationships, be better leaders, and live healthier lives. Thus, the qualities of emotional intelligence are essential in all walks of life – from managing employees to raising healthy, successful children.

Jimmy Carter has perfected the skills of emotional intelligence throughout his lifetime. His commitment, perseverance, empathy and wisdom can serve as an inspiration to all leaders. Carter masterfully senses, understands and effectively applies the power and insight of emotions in all of his actions. Through Jimmy's life, leaders can discover the value of emotional intelligence as a source of energy to bring about knowledge, trust, creativity and influence.

Carter relies on the teachings of Saint Paul to guide him in building relationships, especially patience, kindness, truthfulness, hope, endurance and generosity. These are the elements of success in life, common to almost all religions. None require wealth, fame, intelligence, education or prestige. Rather, they require emotional maturity. Through emotional intelligence, Carter combines humility and success. It is this authenticity, this ability to mold his inner character with his outer persona, which drives Carter today and brings trust to his relationships with individuals across the globe. He believes he has a deeper calling than simply to be successful – but to be faithful to his followers. Believing that all good things come from the heart, this genuine hopefulness in the human race has brought Jimmy success.

Leaders can learn from Carter's life that the most important elements of success are to stay balanced, manage conflicts and bring others together behind you. These are the key aptitudes of emotional intelligence, of which Jimmy Carter is a master.

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